



**Archives & Records
Association**
UK & Ireland

ARA Archive Volunteer Award 2021 Announcement

The annual award recognises outstanding work involving volunteers in an archive and records service. The award is organised by the Volunteer Committee of ARA and sponsored by the ARA, the National Archives (UK) and sector partners.

After much deliberation, the panel of judges chose this year's joint winning entries: Suffolk Archives' [Pride in Suffolk's Past project](#) and Warwickshire County Record Office's Warwickshire Online Volunteer Network's (WOVeN) [Mining the Seams project](#).

Sally Bevan, Secretary of the ARA's Volunteer Committee, comments: "These were two excellent projects with little to separate them, so the panel were torn between which to choose as the overall winner. Although we normally only have one overall winner, given the challenging year archive services have endured, we wanted to celebrate and thank as many of our volunteers as possible for continuing to 'stick with us' so we decided to opt for a joint 2021 winner."

Pride in Suffolk's Past project



Suffolk Archives has developed a county-wide programme of activities aimed at engaging more people than ever before with Suffolk's archival heritage. The 'Sharing Suffolk Stories' initiative enables groups of people to learn more about where they live, create their own responses to it and share their work as widely as possible – including to new audiences. Volunteers are supported to delve into Suffolk Archives' collections to uncover unique stories about the people, places and events of the county, often hidden in the archives.

The aim of the Pride in Suffolk's Past project, which is part of the Sharing Suffolk Stories initiative, is two-fold: to explore and share the hidden stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people in Suffolk, and to collect contemporary stories of Suffolk's LGBTQ+ community, documenting people's experiences through a period of monumental societal change in attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity. Due to legal and social repression, these stories have all too often gone untold. Through original documents found in Suffolk Archives and local collections, these experiences can be shared for future generations to understand how things have changed over time and what work is still to be done.

The Pride in Suffolk's Past project was commended for the way it engaged people who do not traditionally use or interact with archives. The judging panel liked how the project took into consideration ethical issues when developing the project and that the volunteers were central to the

project and took a proactive role in steering it. The team succeeded in overcoming the limitations of collecting during the pandemic and still managed to harvest stories to be added to the archive.

Mandy Rawlins, Suffolk Archives Community and Learning Officer (East Suffolk), comments:

“We are so excited to receive this award and our appreciation goes to all the volunteers who have travelled with us on this journey as a team, discovering, collecting and sharing the LGBTQ+ stories of Suffolk. We are very lucky to have such a dedicated group of volunteers with a variety of skills who have made this project such a success by connecting with the LGBTQ+ community and showcasing lived experiences and stories from the past. Their research, creativity, time, knowledge, expertise, passion, and joyous presence elevated this project to a scale which reached so many people locally, nationally and through so many creative mediums – we cannot thank them enough! We must also thank the National Lottery Heritage Fund for supporting this project.”

Warwickshire County Record Office’s WOVeN Mining the Seams project



Warwickshire Mining the Seams WOVeN (Warwickshire Online Volunteer Network) encompasses several projects combining the use of digital technology and archive material to reach new audiences and improve access to collections. One of these is the Wellcome Trust-funded project, Mining the Seams, which included a volunteer element to digitise and transcribe compensation registers from the Midland Colliery Owners’ Mutual Indemnity Company. The resulting searchable database enables statistical

analysis of compensation payments due to mining incidents across the Midlands. Using the WOVeN model of remote volunteering, Mining the Seams aimed to recruit 20 volunteers, using social media and other online publicity to reach a wider, non-traditional audience.

Digitised images were shared with volunteers via cloud-based servers, along with pre-prepared spreadsheets with which to collect the information needed to create a searchable index. The system requires only basic digital experience as the project team hopes to improve the digital skills and confidence of its volunteers.

The database of compensation database, containing 71,206 entries, was selected as one of Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine’s top 50 New Digital Family History Resources for 2021.

WOVeN continues to develop projects suitable for remote volunteering and is currently recruiting new volunteers at an average rate of one to two a week.

The project was commended for bringing people together in lockdown and helping people develop their technical skills. The judges felt the project was well thought-through, and that the approach the team took was particularly innovative when it came down to the use of technology to support remote volunteering. The well-being aspect of the project, particularly at a time that was challenging for many people who felt isolated, was particularly impressive and they have managed to create and sustain a community as one of the key legacies of the project.

Councillor Heather Timms, portfolio holder for Environment, Climate and Culture with Warwickshire County Council, comments:

"We are delighted to receive such a prestigious award and for the dedication of the staff and volunteers to have been recognised. The hard work and inventiveness of the staff, coupled with the commitment and enthusiasm of the volunteers, has created an amazing way for people to volunteer from their own home from anywhere across the globe. Warwickshire is awash with fabulous heritage and WOVeN gives people the opportunity to connect with some of the most interesting archives we are fortunate to have the privilege to safeguard and share."

All this year's award entries were commended for their commitment to their volunteers and how well they adapted to working online during the pandemic.

Thursday, 29 July 2021 13:17